

# Keeping Our Promise To The Children Of Camden

*Governor Christie Is Leading With Decisive, Bipartisan Action To Turn Around the Failing Camden School District And Ensuring Every Child Receives A Quality Education Regardless Of Zip Code*

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Continuing his commitment to ensure that every child in Camden has access to a high quality education, and building on significant improvements made during the first two months of state intervention, Governor Christie today announced the selection of Paymon Rouhanifard as the first State Superintendent of the Camden School District. The selection of Rouhanifard, formerly of the Newark and New York City public school systems, continues the progress the district has already made since March, including improvements in curriculum, staffing, student health and safety, and academic readiness.

## MEET SUPERINTENDENT PAYMON ROUHANIFARD

Paymon Rouhanifard most recently served as the Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer for Newark Public Schools, New Jersey's largest school district serving more than 35,000 students. Among other initiatives, he led the effort to develop a district-wide school choice system that includes all district and charter schools on one application system, ultimately expanding the access to schools that are the best fit for each child in Newark.

Previously, Rouhanifard served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Office of Portfolio Management at the New York City Department of Education, the nation's largest school district serving more than 1.1 million students. In New York City, Rouhanifard expanded student access to the 1,700 city schools by opening new district and charter schools, changing enrollment policies and zoning/admissions criteria, and phasing out and restarting low-performing schools.

Rouhanifard began his career as a sixth grade teacher at PS 192 in West Harlem, New York, as part of Teach For America.

Rouhanifard was born in Iran, where his family fled when he was a young child, living in refugee camps in neighboring countries and Europe before moving to the United States, where Rouhanifard entered first grade as an English Language Learner. He graduated with a B.A. in Economics and Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## PUTTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN PLACE

Over the past two months, the Christie Administration has assigned some of the most successful statewide and national administrators to work in the Camden School District, including:

- Three former New Jersey Superintendents;
- One former New Jersey Assistant Superintendent;
- The former Chief Financial Officer of the New York City Public Schools;
- A former partner at KPMG Consulting; and
- The hands-on support of the state's Assistant Commissioner for Talent to implement new evaluation systems aligned to the TEACHNJ Act.

The Regional Achievement Center (RAC) in Camden is continuing into its second year, working in partnership with struggling schools and the district to help set clear goals for student growth, put proven turnaround principles into action, and use data to drive decision-making and accountability.

## TAKING SPECIFIC, IMMEDIATE ACTION TO IMPROVE CAMDEN SCHOOLS

Applying lessons from past state interventions, the Christie Administration, working in coordination with local and community leaders, has already taken immediate actions to improve instruction and district operations. Results so far include:

- **Curriculum.** The state has already aligned English language arts and math instruction in K-12 to the Common Core State Standards for the first time, while instituting a new literacy framework. In addition, the state is providing professional development to teachers this summer on the new instructional models.
- **Principals.** The state hired five new turnaround principals, and assigned two principals into each of the district's most struggling schools, including Camden High School and Woodrow Wilson High School.
- **Teachers.** Through new hires and proper assignment, every student will have a teacher in front of the classroom on day one, and by doubling the substitute teaching pool, the state is ensuring that every student will have appropriate instruction throughout the school year. The state also held a first ever matching fair for principals to meet with teachers who did not have a placement this summer. In addition, approximately 50 non-tenured teachers were non-renewed for performance or attendance issues.
- **Resources.** The state centralized procurement to make sure that every student in K-12 literature and K-5 math has a textbook that they can leave at home while also having a classroom set available for in-school work. The state has also replenished books to ensure that every student has the required books on day one in all grades and subjects, including for special education and bilingual students.
- **Technology.** The state has already ordered more than 250 new devices for the start of the school, and is creating special programs in the three schools with the least connectivity – including media labs, mobile computer labs, and one-to-one computers in certain grades. The state will upgrade all schools' technology capabilities by early 2014.
- **Recovering Dropouts.** 345 students dropped out of school in Camden in the last two years. Dropout officers were sent each student's home to re-enroll them in the district, resulting in 35 students re-enrolled in school within the first week of the initiative.
- **Safety.** All security plans are being updated, and the state is installing more than 120 new security cameras in schools.
- **Student Wellness.** The state is expanding a pilot program from two schools to 14 schools to increase student participation in the free breakfast in the classroom programs, and expanding to all schools by December 2013. Beginning in October, those schools will also offer dinner programs for students staying late at school.
- **Special Education.** 20% of students in the Camden school district are classified as needing special education. For the first time, every student will have an appropriate placement, consistent with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), with an appropriately certified teacher.
- **Physical Audit.** A classroom-by-classroom audit of more than 500 classrooms was conducted to create accurate data systems of students, teachers, special education programs, and instructional materials.
- **On Track For Graduation.** Through a partnership with Rutgers University, the state has reviewed the transcript of every high school senior and junior, and for the first time created a personalized path to graduation with the necessary credits for each student. This "grad tracker" will be rolled out to all high school students in the coming school year.
- **School Readiness.** The state is working school-by-school to clean facilities, landscape, and, where necessary, provide new painting in buildings before the start of school.
- **Reviews.** The state conducted full reviews of the district's Special Education and Early Childhood Education programs, and partnered with a national expert, TNTP, to conduct a review of personnel processes and procedures, to inform the work moving forward.

## PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH MORE OPTIONS WHILE BUILDING A STRONGER SCHOOL DISTRICT

In the coming school year, New Jersey will be implementing school-by-school improvement plans to improve student outcomes in district schools. Beyond investment in district run schools, the Christie Administration is committed to ensuring

that every child in Camden has access to a high-quality education, regardless of whether that student is in a district, charter, vocational, or Renaissance school. The state has already taken several steps to increase and strengthen existing options:

- Opened two new charter schools in Camden to increase options at the elementary school level.
- Approved the takeover of Freedom Academy, a low-performing charter school, by Democracy Prep, a national charter operator with a track record of success.
- Continuing to support the development of the state's first approved Renaissance school – KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy – on track to open in September 2014.

The ultimate goal of this process is to improve outcomes for Camden students by providing families with greater opportunities to an array of quality educational options. Governor Christie firmly believes that New Jersey has a moral obligation to provide every child with access to a high-quality education, and that the state simply cannot continue to sit on the sidelines as this fundamental promise goes unfulfilled for so many children in Camden.